

**VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK RENOVATION COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2013  
TIME: 6:30-8:30  
LOCATION: HUBBARD ROOM, RUSSELL LIBRARY  
MIDDLETOWN, CT**

**Members Present:** Councilman Todd Berch  
Councilman Philip J. Pessina  
Councilman Robert Santangelo  
Councilman Thomas J. Serra  
Jane Harris  
Robert S. Blanchard  
Carl R. Chisem  
Betsy Morgan  
August DeFrance  
Joseph Bibisi

**Staff Present:** Tina Gomes, Finance Department  
Bill Russo, Director of Public Works  
Debbie Stanley, Parks and Recreation Department

**Other Attendees:** Alan Nafis, Weston & Sampson – Project Manager  
Brandon Riley, Weston & Sampson – Landscape Architect  
Linda Bettencourt, Middletown Resident  
Kate Miller, Middletown Resident  
Shawn Beals, Middletown Resident  
Bob Westendorff, Middletown Resident  
Ron Krom, Middletown Resident & Middletown's Complete Streets Committee  
Monica Belivay, Middletown Resident  
Linda Bowers, Middletown Resident  
Sebastian Giuliano, Middletown Resident  
Michael Rogalsky, Middletown Resident  
John Schaeffer, Middletown Resident  
Howard Reid, Complete Streets Committee  
Diane DeLuzio, Connecticut Trees of Honor  
Joan Liska, Middletown Resident  
Ron Organek, Middletown Resident  
Art Michaels, Middletown Resident  
Ken McClellan, Middletown Resident  
Molly Salafia, Middletown Resident  
John Hall, Jonah Center for Earth & Art & Middletown Resident  
Thomas Goglia, Middletown Resident  
Lawrence Riley, Middletown Resident

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:**

Chair Berch introduced himself as Chair of Committee and called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Councilman Pessina stated that a sign-in sheet will be distributed.

Chair Berch thanked everyone for coming to the public hearing so that the public ideas can help bring the park to life.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JULY 10, 2013 & AUGUST 7, 2013:**

On motion of Chair Berch, the minutes dated July 10, 2013 and August 7, 2013 were unanimously approved.

**PRESENTATION BY WESTON & SAMPSON:**

Brandon Riley gave a brief background of the project including pool renovations, splash pads, dog parks, amp theaters, etc. He specified that before jumping into the project, Weston & Sampson looked at other local parks of similar sizes to get a better sense of what they were looking for in terms of aesthetics. One of the parks they looked at was Peckham Park in Middlefield which is only 26 acres but has a lot of the same characteristics. Another park that was looked at was Elm Ridge Park in Rocky Hill which is a bit bigger with large fields and a dog park. He believes that the northern part of the Veteran's park is about 66 acres.

Alan stated that they are trying to organize the park as far as usage to avoid a scattered appearance. The right section where the public pool is will be a part of the active recreational zone. The commemorative center space will consist of the trees of honor walk leading towards the Veteran's museum. There is a passive recreation space for picnicking where they want to include a larger pavillion and a remodeled bathroom close to the center of the park. The grade can possibly be flattened out where an ice skating rink can be placed for winter time. The cross country and nature trails will remain the same other than making more graceful routes. A better form of entry to the park such as subtle entrance signs are needed to help announce the presence of the park more clearly. A walking path along the river with a river launch will be placed as a spot where children can go to learn.

Weston & Sampson architects would like to renovate the pool as far as the thickness of concrete, the depth, and the re-shaping of the pool as a whole to help with the separation of swim meets and free - swim.

It is envisioned that the playground will be moved to the flat open lawn space, adjacent to the pool, to keep the activities all in one area. There is a steep hill leading towards the pool which can be used for concerts or plays.

Moving the museum to a spot at the top of the mound where it consists of a more peaceful direct connection, with a direct view, is being considered. The original proposed museum location consisted of a long steep route that wouldn't be as easily accessible.

The intended dog park location is a flat shady area raised up off the road, away from cars, which was the prior archery area. There is already existing vegetation to give the dogs a spot to cool down. The area is secluded away from the Honor Walk and the picnicking area so that guests can enjoy their visit in peace.

It was suggested that another bridge should be placed next to the American Legion Hall. The Water and Sewer department should be given some preliminaries on what they need to do as far as utilities and how much it will be.

Councilman Pessina specified that the stable flat walking path along the Coginchaug River connects and makes a natural flow with the city and Westfield.

**PUBLIC HEARING OPENED:**

Chairman Berch opened the public hearing portion of the meeting.

Middletown resident, Linda Bettencourt stated that she has spent many hours in the park and that she is excited about the Military Museum, especially where it is going to be located. She wants to be sure that the building does the cause justice and that it is worthy of what it stands for. Linda is excited for the Trees of Honor and the dog park. She would like to have a place to go ice skating like she had when she was a child at Zoars Pond and Pikes Ravine. Linda also suggested that fireworks at Palmer Field should be considered. Shuttles can be brought into the area and people can hang out at picnic tables and utilize charcoal grills in the park.

Middletown resident Bob West wanted to make sure the dog park was going to be fenced in as well as the park being gated off so people cannot get in after dark. Chair Berch verified that the dog park will be fenced in for smaller dogs as well as larger dogs and entrances to the park will be gated after a certain time.

Middletown Resident and member of Middletown's Complete Streets Committee, Ron Krom, stated that he appreciates and welcomes the changes to the park. His main concern is the access to the park for walkers and bicyclists. The park is known as a connection to many other parts of Middletown.

It was then mentioned that another access from Jackson Street to the pedestrian/bicycle bridge at the head of Jackson Street should be considered. There is currently already a pedestrian/ bicycle tunnel that goes under Newfield Street and runs right to Jackson Street.

Middletown Resident Monica Bellvay wanted to go over what Ron Brown had stated earlier. Families with kids, people on bicycles, and older adults may have difficulty walking across Washington or Newfield Street. That access is important because of how challenging it is to take children on tricycles through the path. The more access there is, the more families will be able to come and enjoy the park.

Middletown resident, Sebastian Giuliano stated that a second bridge would be nice but the current one should be improved and made more user friendly. It would help with the access to the overflow of parking at Palmer Field. The dog park raises concern as far as the people that will be around it. There are two kinds of people: dog lovers and everybody else. Everyone else ranges from people who detest dogs or are afraid of dogs all the way up to people who love their own dog but aren't crazy about anybody else's. He feels that it makes it tough when it comes to turning some people away from the park.

Middletown resident, Kate Miller indicated that she wanted to submit a letter on behalf of the Conservation Commission with respect to the impervious paving planned for the parking lot along the river. The main concern is that the Coginchaug River has a lot of mud slides and other developments upstream, such as CVS, have impacted the river. It sends the wrong message, and she believes that the city should spend some time researching previous alternatives. This would provide demonstration to other builders and accomplish protection of the river. Kate wanted to echo on what Ron Brown said about safe access considering she lives on Boston Road. She did some research on traffic reports on Boston Road as it intersects with Washington Street. There were many people injured in that area and although there is a cross walk there now, it is still not sufficient. Drivers use Washington Street as a

highway, so better signage and driver education should be included as part of the plans. Middletown has a larger teenage population than adult population that may or may not be connected to school activities. The park is located in a high density housing area, so it's a perfect spot for teen-orientated activities. She asks that we seek the input from youth groups and high school students as far as including a skating rink, skate park, sledding hills or basketball courts. Having more than one of these activities in the city would be a good idea. Ms. Miller also believes that signs should be placed along the river for educational purposes.

Councilman Berch stated he would include with the minutes of this meeting the copies of letters he has received from the public to date. He also stated he will include copies of the letters with the Committee's final report.

Middletown resident, Mike Rogalski stated that the amount of work occurring is a big improvement. He made a suggestion about the access to Palmer Field. There is a path near the American Legion Building that goes along the Coginchaug River. If a bridge was put in that area to connect with the other side, it would give more access for parking. Access needs to be opened from Palmer field to the current existing bridge which brings you to a fenced in area. Mike stated that the Military Museum is going to be in the shape of a pentagon, and presently, there is 2.5 acres at the current projected sight before it gets moved. He doesn't believe that a dog park should be included in a Veteran's park. However, it was explained to him that it is the best place in Middletown to have a dog park. He strongly believes that the dog park should not be in close proximity to the Connecticut Trees of Honor considering the fact that it is a place where family members travel to talk and be with their loved ones. He suggested that maybe the dog park can be relocated.

Middletown Resident and committee member, Jane Harris, wanted to bring a letter to everyone's attention. The letter is from Kim O'Rourke, Middletown's Recycling Coordinator. Councilman Berch stated that he has a copy and it will be part of the record.

Previous Middletown resident and president of the Jonah Center, John Schaeffer, spoke on behalf of getting better signage. He said that when he first came to Middletown he had no idea that there was such a thing as the Veteran's Park due to the lack of signage. He would also like to speak in favor of Ron Brown from the Complete Streets Committee. The access for pedestrians and bicyclists in the north end, as well as access at the main bridge need to be improved. The chain link fence at Palmer Field should be moved. Security will still be maintained, but public access should also be allowed.

Complete Streets Committee Member, Howard Reid, spoke about the way the park is connected to other parts of the city. He feels it is important to have a destination point to bring people along the paths and take advantage of what is in the park. This park is a desirable place for Middletown and people that enjoy being outdoors. The pool is a valuable asset to the park, but people are limited with what they can do with it because of the current set up.

Middletown resident, Larry Riley stated that he doesn't want to see too much all packed into one park. He wants to keep it small and basic so that everyone can enjoy what it consists of without losing the beauty of the park.

Councilman Santangelo stated that the park was kept busy years ago. The goal is to get activities to be used year round such as skating rinks and swimming pools. The current site originally became valuable

because it was used year round. He would like to continue to see multi-purpose use as well as the park being kept active in the winter time to keep people coming back.

Middletown resident, Linda Bowers brought up the issue of snow deposits and wanted to know if it has been brought up. Councilman Santangelo reassured her that the snow procedure has been changed and an alternate location has been determined. In the future, snow will not be put in that area unless it is as a last resort.

Councilman Pessina indicated that as a child growing up, the park was his playground because he had no back yard. When it comes to park access, he has never had a problem. Traffic was always free-flowing by Jackson Street, Newfield Street, and Meech Road. He stated that access has to be a priority for anyone that wants to go to the park.

Councilman Berch specified that he has spoken to the Police Department regarding security at the park, and it was suggested that bringing the Park Ranger system back is a possibility. Various other measures of security would include security systems, lighting and cameras.

Diane DeLuzio, Connecticut Trees of Honor Memorial, stated that there needs to be more trees planted in the park and that there is enough room for them.

Sebastian Giuliano indicated that accessibility is a big issue. Over time, things have changed drastically in terms of highways. For example, Washington Street was two lanes and there was no route 3. Coming from the south end, it will be tough getting to the park with two major highways within close proximity.

Middletown resident and Acting Parks & Recreation Director Debbie Stanley stated that teens have requested more basketball courts. She believes there should also be at least two picnic areas because people are always looking for more spaces. She's concerned with concerts becoming a noise issue. In the past, Palmer Field put on an event with fireworks, and there were many complaints as far as ash on the roofs of cars. The park should be handicap accessible so that everyone can have access to the park's activities and the swimming pool. Swim teams have not been able to use the pool for meets because there are over 100 kids on the team.

John Schaeffer wanted to add that he likes the basic plan and the thematic approach to the park.

Middletown resident, Joan Liska, stated that the least impact to the park as far as wetlands go, the better. The trails need to be developed and maintained more. She loves the idea of honoring the veterans. Joan doesn't think that the dog park is an inappropriate site near the reflecting pool due to the noise occurrence as well as liability. The waste will need to be picked up at all times by the dog owners. If they don't pick it up themselves, the Middletown city workers will end up having to do it, which may pose an issue with the taxpayers.

Kate Miller stated that the kayak launch could be included if the dog park is relocated towards the front of the park.

Middletown resident and commissioner, Robert Blanchard, voiced his concern with longevity and maintenance. He believes that everyone should learn from what went wrong with the original park so that history doesn't repeat itself.

Middletown resident, Ron Organek wanted clarification on the Military Museum, and if it is going to be moved or not. Councilman Berch informed him that a subject like that is a topic of discussion for another night and that this meeting is intended for ideas only.

Middletown resident, Art Michaels wanted to know if there has been any talk about opening up the Jackson Street Bridge. It was mentioned that the idea is being taken into consideration to have the bridge available for walking as opposed to driving. The infrastructure is already there, it just needs to be cleaned up.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:**

As there was no further discussion, Councilman Berch closed the meeting at 7:23 P.M. He thanked everyone for coming and stating their opinions.